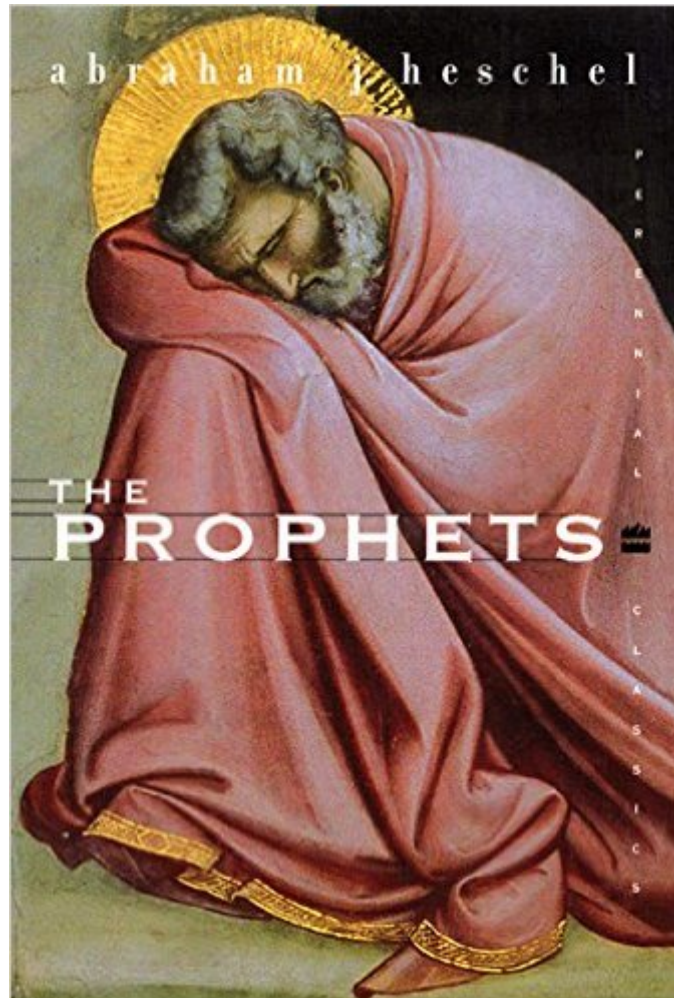


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# The Prophets (Perennial Classics)



## Synopsis

Abraham Heschel is a seminal name in religious studies and the author of *Man Is Not Alone* and *God in Search of Man*. When *The Prophets* was first published in 1962, it was immediately recognized as a masterpiece of biblical scholarship. *The Prophets* provides a unique opportunity for readers of the Old Testament, both Christian and Jewish, to gain fresh and deep knowledge of Israel's prophetic movement. The author's profound understanding of the prophets also opens the door to new insight into the philosophy of religion.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Rabbi Abraham Heschel is an intellectual and prophetic hero of mine. Any one who would stand up to the pope and say 'I'd rather die than convert' (when trying to get the Roman Catholic Church to drop 'conversion of the Jews' as an official aim of the church) has the sort of integrity of belief and identity that I aspire to and most likely will never attain. Heschel's book 'The Prophets' became an almost instant classic. Simply reading through the chapter titles and subtitles (a partial list of titles appears at the bottom of this review) will give a sense of the breadth and depth of this work. Heschel sees an urgent need for prophets and prophecy in today's world. 'The things that horrified the prophets are even now daily occurrences all over the world.' In examining the prophecies of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nathan, &c, he discerns the common strands of the word of God in all that they said and did, and teaches the reader how to discern similar prophetic aspects in today's world. 'The

prophet is human, yet he employs notes one octave too high for our ears.' The Bible says, let him who has ears to hear, listen. Alas, ordinarily we do not have the hearing range to be able to give adequate attention and comprehension to today's prophetic voices. Most often the voice of the prophet is one we do not want to hear (look at how the Israelites reacted to their prophets!). Prophets were often seen as doom-sayers and problematic people. Indeed, every prediction of disaster is in itself an exhortation to repentance. The prophet is sent not only to upbraid, but to 'strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.' Every prophetic utterance, according to Heschel, has to have within its core a message of hope.

This two-volume work is one of the best I know of for explaining how Jews relate to the Prophets. While non-Jews tend to think of "prophets" as psychics who foretell the future, the Jewish concept of a prophet is someone who is inspired by God to advance the cause of social justice by confronting the people and their rulers. "Feed the widow, the orphan, the stranger!" shouts the prophet in the marketplace. "Forsake your dead idols -- return to the Lord!" he tells the king. Yes, the prophet may foretell future events, but he also preaches another option: return to the ways of God, and the terrible things foretold in a prophecy may not have to happen. A prophecy is a warning, a call to repentance -- not a prognostication written in stone. Heschel's scholarship in this work is excellent and very, very readable, even if you are not a seminarian. Like his shorter books, such as "The Sabbath" and "The Earth is the Lord's," this work is written in dynamic, inspiring prose that reaches the level of fine literature. In the first volume, he discusses specific biblical prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc. (Christians may be surprised to learn that, in classical Jewish sources, the "suffering servant" refers to Jacob who, in turn, is used by Isaiah as a metaphor for the entire Jewish people collectively. In other words, the Jews are the "suffering servant" of God, not Jesus.) Volume II discusses more general concepts about prophets and prophecy. As an historical note, I would add that Rabbi Heschel not only wrote about prophets and social responsibility, he also walked the walk -- quite literally. He was active in the Civil Rights movement in the USA, and walked with Dr.

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